



# Al-Risala 1991

July

## Editorial

'Many a small band has, by God's grace, prevailed over a large one. God is with the steadfast'. (2:249).

This verse of the Qur'an shows that if a minority group' is suffering at the hands of a powerful majority, there is nothing in this for them to feel depressed or frustrated about. This should be looked upon as one of the God-given opportunities for the weaker group ultimately to dominate the more powerful group.

How can such a reversal of the present order take place? The secret, according to this verse, lies in patience. Those who are faced with challenges require more alertness and need to make more efforts just to survive; the patience and endurance which they learn in the process are what enable such a group to dominate and conquer the more powerful group.

Patience for a human being or a human group is just like the heat applied to water. When water is heated up to a hundred degrees centigrade, it starts boiling. The molecules are broken, and they scatter outward in the form of vapour. In this way heat converts water into gas. Water taking the form of gas becomes so powerful that it can move mighty machines.

In a similar way, when a group is continually faced with adverse circumstances, when its very identity is challenged, it reaches the point of explosion. Its latent capabilities are so aroused that it rises from the state of "water" and turns into "vapour".

History shows that whenever a group has faced persecution, its potential has been awakened. It has emerged in the form of an unconquerable force. It has patience that converted this ordinary group into an extraordinary group. Patience enabled it to dominate a group far greater in numbers and in power.

4 July 1991

### The best charity is that which is given to the weakest person

Suraqah ibn Malik says that the Prophet once asked him: "Shall I tell you what the greatest charity is?" "Please do," Suraqah replied. Then the Prophet said: "It is to spend upon a daughter who – after being widowed or divorced is returned to you, and has no other source of support but yourself."

## Life After Death

October 2, 1968, marked one hundred years from the time of Gandhiji's birth. On this occasion Gandhiji's birth centenary was celebrated with great enthusiasm. One of the many programmes laid on by the government was arranged by the Delhi Telephone Department. It was called "Dial 172 and listen to Gandhiji." This special service provided by the Delhi Telephone Department, made it possible to be in contact with Mahatma Gandhi. His recorded voice could be heard by anyone who dialled 172.

Man leaves the world, but his voice survives. Man dies, but his voice lives on after him. This fact is indicative of man's personality being a continuous reality. It continues to remain in the living state long after he has expired.

This is what seems to be alluded to in this verse which mentions the Last Day and the- life after death: "I swear by the Lord of heaven and earth that this is true, as true as you are speaking now!" (Qur'an, 51:23)

Man's personality continues to survive in part through his voice. We directly witness this happening. Now, when it is known that the human personality continues to live on in part after death, then it is not difficult to understand that the human personality continues to exist in complete form. The knowledge of one (of the survival of the personality in part through the voice) makes the other (the survival of the whole personality) understandable.

Once the existence of the part is proved, the existence of the whole is proved of itself. The existence of the human voice after death makes the concept understandable that the whole human personality continues to live after death.

The hearing of the voice, today, of a person who has expired in 1948, shows that man is still living today, even though he is not visible to us.

4 July 1991

**Wrongful accusation is the worst possible crime**

Ali ibn Abu Talib was asked what weighed heaviest upon the heavens "Wrongful accusation of an innocent person," he replied.

## The Great Teacher

In his first days in the white House, John Kennedy was like a child in a sweet shop. He loved it: the honours, the trappings, the power, the perks, the gadgets. Press a button for a helicopter, Air Force one always ready to go anywhere, instant telephone contact with anyone. Kennedy joked about how he could wave his hand or move his little finger, and 20 people would jump. "I can't remember what it was like not to be President. "Kennedy wore three suits a day every day he lived in the White House. Moreover, he made 100,000 dollars a year as President. The power and grace of President Kennedy were such that he had the great luxury of selection.

But none of these advantages were able to save Kennedy from his death, and this was the greatest problem of U.S. President. He talked a great deal about death. "They can't touch me while I'm alive," he once said, "and after I'm dead, who cares?"

"The poignancy of men dying young haunted him," said his wife, Jacqueline Kennedy. One of his favourite poems was, "I Have a Rendezvous with Death," written by Alan Seeger, a young American poet killed in world War I. Isaiah Berlin, the philosopher, dined with Kennedy and came away with the feeling that the President felt he had to make his mark quickly because of the unpredictability of his death. Other friends also felt that the President's restlessness was partly due to his feeling that he would never live out a normal life-span. "What do you think of the fact that for the last hundred years every President of the united States elected in a year divisible by 20 has died in office?" Kennedy asked his personal physician, Dr. Janet Travell. "I don't know why it was "Senator George Smatherg said," but death became kind of an obsession with Jack."

Excerpts from Ralph G. Martin's

*A Hero For Our Time*, Macmillan, New York)

As the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, said, "Death is a destroyer of pleasure." Death has no fixed time to come. It comes at anytime. Death is completely unpredictable. This aspect of death is enough to snatch away one's peace, be one President or the man in the street.

If one thinks only about death, one will be very prudent, very sincere; Death is the greatest teacher of man, yet there are few who will take a lesson from this teacher.

## God is Matchless

It has been said in the Qur'an that Allah is matchless (Al-Shura 11). Allah is supreme. And this very fact makes him the Lord of the whole universe. This should make us bow before Him; accept His authority and acknowledge our weakness.

God has always been present. Man has come into existence because He created him. God is above being created. His presence is eternal He has always been and He will always be. He is one. He is independent of everything. He has neither a father nor a son. There is no equal to Him.

God has the power to create from nothingness. It is He who created things which did not exist before. Matter, light, energy and intelligence which can be seen in the world today, are all His creation. He has brought them into this world.

God knows about hidden things. He knows the future. From this emerged the universe, in which each system is integrated to a faultless functioning.

God is alive. He needs no sleep. He needs no rest. He is running his big universe continuously. For billions of years, things have moved with fixed regularity without a pause. There has been no disturbance. God is all-powerful. Man derives his strength from Him. God can see everything. Man derives his sight from Him. God is dispenser of intelligence and comprehension to man. God can see everything. Man derives his sight from Him. God is everything. God possesses qualities that are known and also that are not known to us. In this world we have seen only God's creation, but, in the life of the hereafter, will witness His sovereignty.

7 July 1991

### The Prophet did not allow his hand to be kissed

The Prophet bought some cloth from a shopkeeper: The transaction completed, the Prophet got up to leave. The shopkeeper made as if to kiss the Prophet's hand, but the Prophet immediately put his hand behind his back and said: 'This is what Asian people do with their kings. I am not a king; I am just one of you.'



## The Right to Choose

*The Times of India* (11 August, 1990) carried an article by Mr. Alope Roy under the heading, 'Only Bigots Feel that Conversion Follows Invasions.'

The writer states that the VHP strongly advocated a ban on the telefilm, 'The Sword of Tipu Sultan'. The reason advanced by the VHP was that in the eighteenth century, Tipu Sultan had forcibly converted many Hindus in the Malabar region.

The writer ridiculed the VHP's demand. He said that even if the conversion story of Malabar 'was accepted as being true, it would, arguably, be the people of Malabar who should have raised this issue. But the fact remains that neither the Muslims nor the Hindus of Malabar have voiced any protest against the screening of the film.

He also cites the conversions at Minakshipuram, when some Harijans of Minakshipuram entered the fold of Islam, the Hindus alleged that the conversion had taken place with the lure of money. The writer argues that if the allegation be true, the easiest solution would be for the concerned Hindus to outbid the converters.

In his article, Mr. Alope Roy goes on to advocate total freedom in the matter of religious belief. He feels that it should be left to individuals to decide what religion they want to follow. Every man has a right to do so.

What the writer has said is absolutely correct. If we pride ourselves on having opted for democracy, we have to give full freedom to our people to choose their religion too. Without this freedom, democracy will be a mirage.

8 July 1991

### Conceit: the most evil trait

The Prophet mentioned three saving graces and three destructive traits. The three saving graces, he said, were “fear of God in public and in private; speaking the truth, at times of both calm and anger; and moderation, whether one is affluent or poor,” And the destructive traits he mentioned were following one’s desires, miserliness and conceit. “And the last one, that is the worst of all,” he said.

(Baihaqi)

## The Prophet of Islam

The Prophet of Islam was born in ancient Mecca which, in those days, was dominated by polytheism, so much so that all of the peoples' interests had come to be associated with it. But the Prophet raised himself above the prevailing atmosphere. Instead of compromising with these circumstances, he devoted himself whole-heartedly to seeking the truth. God then came to his assistance, and he was blessed not only with the truth but also with prophethood.

He became a true worshipper of God, making Him the focus of all his best and highest feelings. Surrendering his whole existence to God, he spent his days and his nights in His worship. Not only in public but also in private, he went constantly in fear of God.

His was a high, moral character, so that in spite of being badly treated by others, he went on returning good behaviour for evil. People harmed him, yet he would pray for them. He would remain patient in the face of oppression and, regardless of the provocation, he would refrain from becoming incensed.

When it became impossible for him to stay on his own home town—Mecca—he left for Medina. His departure from his birthplace was more in the nature of migration than of flight, for 'flight' suggests 'fleeing from an enemy' – whereas the Prophet thought more positively in terms of going away to find a new centre for his *dawah* mission. Wars were waged against him, but he, with his limitless courage, showed his antagonists that the power of peace was far greater than the power of war.

Popularity came his way, but he did not become conceited. Wealth came his way, but he abstained from all luxuries. Power came his way, but its only effect was to increase his humility. Despite all the glory which could have been his, he made his lifestyle one of humility and servitude to God.

He underwent all manner of experiences, economic hardship and prosperity; defeat and success; yet, all throughout these experiences, he remained steadfastly on the path of moderation. At all times' and until the end, he remained the patient and grateful servant of the Almighty.

## The Weakness of Wanting to be Great

Korah (Qarun.), although an Israeli Muslim, has been mentioned in the Qur'an along with Pharaoh and Haman, who were unbelievers. This was because he had severed his relations with the Israelites in order to align himself with Pharaoh, the cruel monarch of the time.

He is mentioned in the Bible by the name of Korah (Exodus, 6:18-21), a cousin of Moses, the father of Moses and Korah being real brother's. Korah was born into an Israelite family and, as such, was a Muslim, according to the religion of the time. God had bestowed upon him an extraordinary personality and exceptional capabilities. Now it very often happens that people who are so gifted suffer-consciously or unconsciously – from the desire to be rewarded for their merits in this world itself. Korah was no different. Beset by this same weakness, he gradually distanced himself from the Israelites, who were, in any case, a downtrodden community, and came closer to Pharaoh.

The key to all worldly glory was held by Pharaoh, and Korah's policy of expediency unlocked all the doors of wealth and honour for him. Driven by an overriding love of wealth and power, he ultimately reached the zenith of glory, standing third in the hierarchy after Pharaoh, the king, and Haman, the Prime Minister. Thus, with his newly acquired high rank, he became one of the pillars of the Coptic empire. He then fancied that he had been granted all these worldly advantages because of his own capabilities. (Qur'an, 28:78). On the contrary, his new-found honours were the price of his betrayal of his own community.

The truth of the matter was that Pharaoh had a plan to obliterate the Israelites, but did not want to be accused of having done so because of any grievances he had against them on grounds of race. He needed, therefore, to have in his entourage a well-known figure who was himself an Israelite. In that way, he could pretend that he had only acted for the good of the country, for surely it ought to be obvious to everyone that he would not appoint an Israelite to such a high position if racial prejudice were really a motivating factor. Korah's status, far from being the result of his own merits, were attained, therefore, at the cost of the Israelites' destruction.

Korah's ultimate fate is described in the Qur'an:

Qarun (Korah) was one of Musa's people. But he treated them with insolence, for we had given him such treasures that their very keys would have weighed down a band of sturdy men. His people said to him: 'Do not exult (in your riches); Allah does not love the exultant. But seek, by means of that which Allah has given you, to attain the abode of the Hereafter. Do not forget your share in this world. Be good to others as Allah has been good to you, and do not strive for evil in the land, for Allah does not love the evildoers.' But he replied, 'These riches were given me on account of the knowledge I possess.' Did he

not know that Allah had destroyed before him from the generations men who were mightier and greater money-collectors than he? The wrongdoers shall not be questioned about their sins. And when he went out in all his finery among his people, those who loved this life said: 'Would that we had the like of Qarun's fortune! He is indeed a lucky man.' But those to whom knowledge had been given said: 'Alas for you! better is the reward of Allah for him who has faith and does good works; but none shall attain it save the patient.'

We cause the earth to swallow him, together with his dwelling, so that he found none to protect him from Allah; nor was he one of those who defended themselves. And those who on the day before had coveted his lot began to say: 'Behold! Allah gives abundantly to whom He will and sparingly to whom He pleases. Had he not shown us favour, He could have caused the earth to swallow us. Behold! The ungrateful shall never prosper.'" (28:76-82).

### Kindness to animals

Abdullah ibn Mas'ood recalls how, when they were with the Prophet on a journey, they pitched camp in a place where there was a bird's nest, with a mother and two baby birds in it. They caught the baby birds, as a result of which the mother started squawking and fluttering its wings. When the Prophet learnt of this, he told whoever had wronged the bird to return its babies. Once the Prophet saw that an ants' nest had been incinerated. He asked who had done this. When the people responsible owned up, he told them that no one save the Lord was entitled to punish by fire.

## The Greatness of God

Everyone has a great fund of stories all about his own greatness, but no one has a similar fund of stories describing the greatness of God.' Articles are published in our journals which are entirely devoted to extolling the glory and greatness of our leader, describing how their shining personalities have dazzled every corner of the globe with their radiance. There will be no mention in such articles of God's wonders, yet they will all end with this short sentence: "All praise is due to God." When seen in the totality of the speeches and articles, this short sentence will appear out of place. When entire articles and speeches are devoted to the greatness of man, does it really mean anything to say that 'all praise is due to God?' Such conclusions are just a part of a formality, they are not genuinely meant. After man's virtues having been so extolled, this little phrase serves no better purpose than to fill in a blank. It does not express any great love of God. If someone belonging to another religion were to make a speech or write an article on his own beloved personality, he too would most likely end his speech with some such phrase from his religious traditions, while a Muslim would choose one from his religious scriptures. Outwardly, these conclusions differ, one being Islamic, the other non-Islamic yet these different concluding phrases are no doubt the same when looked at from the point of view of the psychology working behind it. In reality, there is no difference between the two.

Those who are proud of their activities, regarding them as achievements, will very soon learn that in the eyes of God their activities are as valueless as the roamings of an ant in a pile of mud. This earth is not a manifestation (*jalwa gah*) of the charisma of their *akabirs* (so-called senior religious personalities). It is the manifestation of God's grandeur. Whenever anyone extols the greatness of someone other than God on this earth, he is telling the biggest lie that anyone can tell.

Whenever hymns are sung to the glory of a human being both the extoller and the listener are cursed by all the things of this earth and the heavens. On the other hand, when God's glory is extolled, the earth and the heavens reverberate with the praises of God. Eulogies of human beings are uttered by false tongues and heard by false ears. But one who is so blessed as to sing the glories of God receives inspiration from the angels.

When one is enchanted by the glories of a human being, one goes on extolling his virtues unceasingly. On the other hand, when one is touched by the greatness of God, one is left speechless. Words expressing the greatness of man are written on the best of paper and are read out at glittering functions, whereas the expression of the greatness of God is stirred up in the hearts of the faithful and only privacy has the honour of bearing witness to it. The difference between those who live in the glories of man and those who live in the glories of God is the same as the difference between man and God.

## Having an Independent Mind

When a gale is blowing, smaller birds are entrapped and dragged along in its wake, but the bigger birds with their greater wing power can fly high, thus setting themselves free of the intensity of the storm. Hence the American proverb, 'big bird of the storm'

In the same way, there are two levels of human thought. There is the thinking which is conditioned by circumstances, revolving around the happenings of the immediate environment. People who, thinking in this way, fail to rise above their circumstances, also fail to think independently. But there are those who, like the 'big bird of the storm', have the ability to rise above their surroundings. Their thinking is not conditioned thinking. They form their opinions by rising above their circumstances.

This second type of thinking could very appropriately be termed 'big bird thinking'.



## A Comparison

Aleksandr Tosipko, at 50 a well-known Russian philosopher, and professor at the Moscow Institute of International Economic and Political Studies, interviewed in Moscow by a correspondent of the American weekly, *Newsweek*. A report of the interview appeared in the July 23, 1990, issue of the magazine. Here is one of the questions and its answer.

Q. How did your views of Marxism evolve?

What was most important in your personal development?

A. When you read *Das Kapital*, it's all crystal clear by the time you reach page three. Only an idiot can really believe in Marxism.

Marx's book on the capitalist economy, *Das Kapital*, was written in German and first published in 1867. The socialists believed that this book was the 'Qur'an' of the modern age. Now man had no further need of the Bible or the Qur'an to guide him. All he needed was *Das Kapital*. However, within a period of just one century, the magical aura around it had been dispelled to the point where, in the very heart of the communist world, the book was referred to as an 'idiocy'.

Now, let us take the Qur'an. It has retained its importance for the last fourteen hundred years. Anything of a nature likely to undermine its importance has yet to be proved. The same holds for anything which casts aspersions on the Prophet to whom it was revealed. The Qur'an is, to date, completely free of any shadow of a doubt. This is an undeniable proof of the eternal truth of the Qur'an.

So far as books written by human beings are concerned, they are apt to reveal their errors before the reader has even reached page three. In striking contrast to this, the Qur'an reveals itself to be flawless right up to the very last page. This academic truth suffices to prove that the Qur'an is divine rather than human in origin.

## Negative Thinking

Jamal Abdul Nasser (1918-1970) was a junior army officer during the reign of Shah Farouq. When the war broke out between Israel and Egypt, he showed exemplary courage along with his soldiers on the battlefield. Ultimately, however, Israel was the victor, having inflicted a humiliating defeat on the Egyptian forces.

Consequently, Jamal Abdul Nasser was consumed with feelings of revenge. On the one hand, he wanted to settle scores with Shah Farouq, a traitor in his eyes, while on the other, he wanted to avenge himself on Israel which was the oppressor. He decided not to rest until both his enemies were obliterated.

To start with, he entered into a conspiracy with some Egyptian army officers. On 23 July, 1952, Nasser staged a coup to overthrow the regime of Shah Farouq. It was successful and Shah Farouq went into exile in Rome where he died on 18 March, 1956.

The next target of his revenge was Israel. After establishing himself as the President of Egypt, he acquired stockpiles of arms from the USSR, and became involved in two wars with Israel, in 1956 and 1967. Both times he suffered a shattering defeat. Not only did Israel emerge the victor, but it was also able to make a five-fold increase in its occupied territory.

Jamal Abdul Nasser's rise was based on the negative feeling of revenge. This negative mentality became the hallmark of all his activities. In 1962 he invaded Yemen. He tried to crush the Ikhwan party in Egypt. He was responsible for killing his own army officers. He consistently engaged himself in such non-productive activities till he suffered a heart attack and died in 1970.

Those who are driven by negative thinking and feelings of revenge remain slaves to these feelings till the end. They can hardly be expected to do anything positive or constructive. Unfortunately, the present-day Muslim leaders are treading the same path. They have not been able to rise above negative thinking, and that is why they have made no positive achievements.

## Meditation

The concept of meditation is found in one form or the other in every religion. However, there is a fundamental difference in this matter between Islam and other religions. That is, the goal of meditation in most religions is basically self-realisation whereas, in Islam, the goal is God-realization.

For instance, the goal of meditation in Buddhism, as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (1984) says in its article on 'Buddhist Mysticism' is:

"All meditational techniques aim at enabling the practitioner to come closer to his (own) being." (3/415).

This concept of meditation is not to be found in Islam. It is because the actual, reality in Islam is God. God is the Creator of man, man is His creature. Man's purpose in life is to 'realize God and worship Him.

In other religions the focus of realization is either self-oriented or abstractly reality-oriented. Whereas according to Islam, God is separate from man. He is self-existent. And man's goal in life is to try to seek this separate and permanent God at the level of consciousness.

The method of meditation practised in Sufism is generally regarded as representing the method of meditation in Islam. However, I personally do not consider Sufism to be Islam. Sufism, as I view it, is a permanent religion in itself.

Although Sufism uses Islamic terminology, the form and the method of Sufism has been derived from mysticism instead of from the Qur'an and the sunnat which are the sources of Islam.

The more appropriate word for meditation in Islam is contemplation, that is reflection. The basis of meditation in Islam is thinking and reflecting. This reflection is done on the creation, that is to say, to realise the creator through pondering over His creations. This verse of the Qur'an provides an apt illustration of Islamic meditation:

"In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day, there are signs for men of sense, those that remember Allah when standing, sitting, and lying down, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth (saying): 'Lord! you have not created these in vain. Glory be to you! Save us from the torment of the Fire, Lord.'" (3:190-90)

Abu Dhar Ghafari, a companion of the Prophet says: Even when a bird was seen flying in the air, the Prophet would remind us knowledge from it.

God's universe provides the introduction to God. The existence of creation speaks of the existence of the Creator. The vastness of space speaks of the power of God which is unfathomably vast. The co-existence of various parts of the universe is an indication to the successful planning of God. The universe in continuous action is an indication that the Lord of the universe is a living being. The meaningfulness of the universe is an expression of the meaningfulness of God's being.

The loftiness of the mountains, the shining of the sun, the flowing of the river, the blowing of the wind and from the chirping of the birds to the galaxies and black holes in spaces all are God's manifestation. Meditation is to ponder over these divine manifestations and attributes in order to get to know them in their depths, because it is through these signs that God can be realized. This is Islamic meditation.

17 July 1991

### Placing necessity before formality

When the Prophet emigrated from Mecca to Medina, he stayed in the house of Abu Ayub Ansari. There was an upper storey to his house. The Prophet stayed downstairs and Abu Ayub, along with his family, upstairs, but soon Abu Auyb felt that it was not appropriate for him to be living above the Prophet. So he asked God's Messenger to stay upstairs, and they would move down. "Don't worry about that," the Prophet said. "It's better for me to stay downstairs. It makes things easier for people who come to Visit me"

(Seerat Ibn Kathir)

## The Onus of Moral Responsibility

When Jews were being arrested in Germany in the days of Adolf Hitler, many jokes about them came into vogue. One of them went like this. A Jew was running frantically along the road. Seeing him run so fast, another Jew asked him what the matter was. 'You run too!' was his reply. When the other asked him why, the first Jew replied. "A wolf has escaped from the zoo and an order has been issued to shoot it dead." The second Jew then asked in amazement, "But how are we in danger? We aren't wolves. Why on earth should we run away? The first Jew replied, "All right, we aren't wolves. But can we prove it?"

This story illustrates the psychology of fear. One who goes in fear and trepidation considers every problem as if it were his own, anticipating that he will be held responsible if anything goes wrong. Being afraid of someone means that he finds himself weaker than the other party. When he is of the belief that the power of judgement lies in the hands of another person, and he fears that he might be held guilty, he wonders how he will plead 'not guilty' and whether he will finally be exonerated of all blame.

God's power is the greatest of all powers, the ultimate power of all judgement rests with Him. As such, one who realizes God becomes ever conscious of, and perennially concerned about the consequences of his actions in the eyes of God. He starts thinking of how many errors he might be held guilty in the court of God. In order to save himself on this occasion, he becomes over-cautious in dealing with people, trying always to be generous towards others and to give them more than their due.

When any colleague or subordinate does anything wrong, he takes the blame on himself, because if God on the Day of Judgement were to say that he was responsible for the wrongdoer's actions, he would have no excuse to offer to his Creator. If an act of cruelty is perpetrated, even without his knowledge, he trembles in fear of God. He holds it against him that, as a leader in full enjoyment of the trust of his followers, he remained in ignorance of this injustice. Again, he would have no excuse to offer to God. Similarly if anyone is unjust to another within his sphere of influence, he becomes agitated, because he fears that if God decreed that this incident had taken place due to the atmosphere created by his activities, he would not be able to prove his innocence. Then again, if someone calls out to him for help, and he subsequently becomes ill at ease thinking of his own inevitable condemnation, if God should consider that it was more important for him to have helped one of His servants, who was in need, than to have made excuses about having to do his own work.

19 July 1991

## Keep the Doctor A way

A city dweller saw a villager who was 60 yet looked very healthy and active. He asked the villager what the secret of his health was. The villager replied: "Whenever I am not sure whether to eat or not (that is whenever I am not hungry enough) I prefer not to eat.

What the illiterate villager said in his unpolished words, was exactly what Socrates had said many centuries ago: "Do not eat until you become restless with hunger."

All energy is received from food, but it is also a fact that food is the cause of all diseases. Taking wrong food or deficient food is as harmful as eating without being hungry or over-eating. The secret of health in a phrase is: "Proper food in proper quantity."

If only one could grasp this single principle, one would not need a doctor throughout one's entire life. – Muslema Siddiqui, New Delhi

19 July 1991

### Earning more money does not make one into a better person

Anas told of two brothers who lived in the Prophet's time. One of them used to come and sit in the Prophet's company, while the other used to earn a living for his household. The latter came to the Prophet and complained about his brother not doing any work, and leaving it to him to do all the earning. "Perhaps it is because of him that you are provided with sustenance." the Prophet told him.

(Riadh al Saliheen)



## An Act of Wisdom

The relation between the Muslims and the local residents of the city of Leicester in the UK had not been exactly cordial over the use of a loudspeaker for calling the faithful to prayer. The local Christian community and the department of Health Protection felt that the sound of the amplifier, like Church Bells, must be kept within acceptable limits, and that the morning call over the loudspeaker should certainly be avoided. According to a report published in *The Times, London*, the dispute has been amicably settled. The Muslim leaders and the local authorities discussed the matter across the table and agreed that the use of the loudspeaker would continue except for the morning prayer, and that the sound level would be kept within proper limits. Now the only disagreement is about the night prayer. While the authorities insist that use of the loudspeaker should not be permitted beyond 8 P.M. , the Muslims want the period extended up till 9 P.M. The newspaper report was optimistic that a solution would soon be found to resolve the only outstanding issue. (*Dawat* 25 July, 1990).

What the Muslims in the U.K. have had recourse to is, in simple terms, adjustment. This is what the message of *Al-Risala* is. When the Muslims migrate to the U.K., they are willing to adjust, but in their own country, they consider adjustment to be synonymous with cowardice. They are not willing to pay heed to the call for adjustment.

This is the real problem of the Muslims in India. If they could show the same flexibility in their own homeland, as they do when they migrate to other countries, widespread communal strife would be bound to cease.

Adjustment is not cowardice. It is an integral part of living. It is necessary everywhere, whether you live in a non-Muslim country or not. Its necessity and importance is universally accepted. Without learning to adjust, no progress can be made.

Above all, adjustment prepares the ground and softens attitudes when the message of God has to be spread. Therefore, adjustment is not to be viewed as a matter of expediency but as an act of wisdom.

## Why did I Embrace Islam

In 1922 I left my native country, Austria, to travel through Africa and Asia as a Special Correspondent to some of the leading continental newspapers, and spent from that year onward nearly the whole of my time in the Islamic East. My interest in the nations with which I came into contact was in the beginning that of an outsider only. I saw before me a social order and an outlook on life fundamentally different from the European, and from the very first day there grew in me a sympathy for the more tranquil-I should rather say: more human-conception of life, as compared with the hasty, mechanised mode of living in Europe. This sympathy gradually led me to an investigation of the reasons for such a difference, and I became interested in the religious teachings of the Muslims. At the time in question, that interest was not strong enough to draw me into the fold of Islam, but it opened to me a new vista of a progressive human society, organised with a minimum of internal conflicts and a maximum of real brotherly feeling. The reality, however, of present day Muslim life appeared to be very far from the ideal possibilities given in the religious teachings of Islam. Whatever, in Islam, had been progress and movement, had turned among the Muslims, into indolence and stagnation, whatever there had been of generosity and readiness for self sacrifice, had become, among the present-day Muslims, perverted into narrow-mindedness and love of an easy life.

Prompted by this discovery and puzzled by the obvious incongruity between Once and Now, I tried to approach the problem before me from a more intimate point of view: that is, I tried to imagine myself as being within the circle of Islam. It was a purely intellectual experiment; and it revealed to me, within a very short time, the right solution. I realised that the one and only reason for the social and cultural decay of the Muslims consisted *in* the fact that they had gradually ceased to follow the teachings of Islam in spirit. Islam was still there; but it was a body without soul. The very element which once had stood for the strength of the Muslim world was now responsible for its weakness: Islamic society had been built, from the very outset, on religious foundations alone, and the weakening of the foundations has necessarily weakened the cultural structure-and possibly might cause its ultimate disappearance.

The more I understood how concrete and how immensely practical the teachings of Islam are, the more eager became my questioning as to why the Muslims had abandoned their full application to real life. I discussed this problem with many thinking Muslims in almost all the countries between the Libyan Desert and the Pamirs, between the Bosphorus and the Arabian Sea. It almost became an obsession which ultimately overshadowed all my other intellectual interests in the world of Islam. The questioning steadily grew in emphasis-until I, a non-Muslim, talked to Muslims as if I were to defend Islam from their negligence and indolence. The progress was imperceptible to me, until one day-it was in autumn 1925 in the mountains of Afghanistan-a young provincial Governor said to me: "But you are a Muslim, only you don't know it yourself". I was struck by these words and remained silent. But when I came back to Europe once again, in 1926, I saw that the only logical consequence of my attitude was to embrace Islam.

So much about the circumstances of my becoming a Muslim. Since then I was asked time and again: "Why did you embrace Islam? What was it that attracted you particularly?"—and I must confess: I don't know of any satisfactory answer. It was not any particular teaching that attracted me but the whole wonderful, inexplicably coherent structure of moral teaching and practical life programme. I could not say, even now, which aspect of it appeals to me more than any other. Islam appears to me like a perfect work of architecture. All its parts are harmoniously conceived to complement and support each other; nothing is superfluous and nothing lacking, with the result of an absolute balance and solid composure". Probably this feeling that everything in the teachings and postulates of Islam is "in its proper place", has created the strongest impression on me. There might have been, along with it, other impressions also which today it is difficult for me to analyse. After all, it was a matter of love; and love is composed of many things; of our desires and our weakness. So it was in my case. Islam came over me like a robber who enters a house by night; but, unlike a robber, it entered to remain for good.

Ever since I have endeavoured to learn as much as I could about Islam. I studied the Qur'an and the Traditions of the Prophet (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam); I studied the language of Islam and its history, and a good deal of what has been written about it and against it. I spent over five years in the Hijaz and Najd, mostly in al-Madinah, so that I might experience something of the original surroundings in which this religion was preached by the Arabian Prophet. As the Hijaz is the meeting centre of Muslims from many countries, I was able to compare most of the different religious and social views prevalent in the Islamic world in our days. Those studies and comparisons created in me the firm conviction that Islam, as a spiritual and social phenomenon, is still in spite of all the drawbacks caused by the deficiencies of the Muslims, by far the greatest driving force mankind has ever experienced, and all my interest became, since then, centred around the problem of its regeneration.

(Courtesy: Al-Yaqeen International March 22, 1991).

## All virtue comes from controlling one's tongue

Mu'az ibn Jabal was with the Prophet on one of his journeys. He asked the Prophet to tell him of an action which would take him to heaven, and keep him out of hell. "That is a tremendous question," the Prophet said, "and it is easy for those for whom God makes it easy. Worship God, and do not set up partners alongside Him. Offer prayer, and pay the poor-due; fast during the month of Ramadhan and go on a pilgrimage to the House of God."

"Shall I tell you the source of all virtue?" the Prophet went on to ask Mu'az, and without waiting for an answer he said: "Fasting is a shield, and charity extinguishes sins as water extinguishes fire. And be sure to pray in the stillness of the night."

"And shall I tell you what the base of religion is, what its pillar is and what its pinnacle is?" the Prophet asked.

"Please do," Mu'az replied:

"Its base is Islam; its pillar is prayer; and its pinnacle is jihad. And shall I tell you what the root of all these things is?"

"Of course," Mu'at said eagerly.

Then the Prophet caught hold of his tongue and said: "Control this."

"What," Mu'az said, "shall we be taken to task for what we say?" "Of course you will," the Prophet replied. "It is because of people's tongues that they will be thrown head first into the fire of hell"

## The Factory of the Universe

If you happen to visit a man-made factory, you will be shown round its various departments and its methods of functioning will be explained to you. You will find instructions hung at 'various places telling you about the working of the machinery. There will be personnel at every point to answer your queries. Besides, the factory will provide you with ample literature containing all the necessary information.

The universe is the biggest of all these 'factories'. But nowhere is there an instruction board, nowhere is there a guide to explain it. Planning and manufacturing go on there. There is the packaging industry, and there is also a constant arrangement for supplies. Here the laws of supply and demand are observed. Here there is also an arrangement for the recycling of industrial waste. Here there is control and balance, as well as an arrangement for procuring raw materials. There is all this and much more, but there is no one to tell us about it, no one to explain it to others. The tall peaks of the mountains appear like a universal stage, but on their summits there is no speaker. When the birds twitter it appears that they are going to convey some message, but we never receive it because we fail to understand their language. When there is thunder and lightning, it seems as if they are the vocal chords of nature, announcing some message, but their language too remains unintelligible to man.

'Faith' is what fills this vacuum in the human being, making him the confidante of nature's secrets. The believer is, in a way, a scientist. A scientist explores the solar system amongst the scattered spheres of the 'universe. He attempts to discover the hidden powers of matter. In static matter he sees a moving machine. Similarly a believer sees in the visible world, a world that is invisible. He finds in creation the Creator. He finds in organization the Organiser.

When faith reaches its culmination, it is converted into *daw'ah* (invitation). *Daw'ah* means to give words to the wordless melody of the universe. A *da'i* (preacher) is a person who converts God's silent communication into an audible one. He hears the message from the Creator and delivers it to the people. *Daw'ah* means to act as a representative of God on God's earth.

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## Reminiscences

When I was a student of Engineering at Banaras Hindu University in 1954, an incident took place which is worthy of mention. My teacher, Dr. Pran Nath, was giving a lecture on the Laplace transform. During his lecture, he narrated an interesting story connected with this subject. It concerned Professor M. Sen Gupta, the then Principal of the Engineering College of the Hindu University.

Professor Gupta had received his higher education at Glasgow University, where he was a topper. One day, a Professor of Glasgow University was solving an electrical problem on the blackboard in the class room. The question of a differential equation came up. The Glasgow Professor solved it by employing the usual method, which took up much time and the whole of the blackboard. On seeing this, Mr. Gupta said to his professor: "Here the Laplace transform can be applied, which will solve this question far more quickly and in much less space. When the Professor applied this as suggested to him by his student, the question was solved in just two lines, although the methods were different, the solution was the same. The Professor said: "When we have a method to solve this question in so much less time and space, then it is certainly wrong to employ the former lengthy method. Then the Professor rubbed his solution off the blackboard and, replacing it with Professor Gupta's method, he said: 'this is the only method.'

Another such incident happened in 1964 when the Indian University of Education started its 'Summer School for Teachers' programme in collaboration with the Education Division of the American Government. There were three visiting American Professors besides the Indian Professors. At that time I was working as a senior Lecturer in Chandauli Polytechnic, and I had attended the summer school at Chandigarh in that capacity. (This was the first course, which was held from June 15 to July 24 in 1964).

One day the American Professor Matchel put a question to the class: 'Who are creative?' Different people gave different answers. One said, 'Poet'. The Professor could not understand because of the way the Indian teacher pronounced it. He kept saying 6 +

'What? What?! Only when he was given the spelling of the word, 'did he finally understand it. (Indians pronounce it as 'poet', but Americans pronounce it as 'pait'.) The reaction of the American professor has a great lesson for us. He said: "You are right, I am wrong, because I am in your country."

-A.M. Khan

Deputy Director of Education  
Faizabad

## Choosing the Best Method

Five billion dollars are spent annually on drinks by the Australians. So writes the Australian journalist, Mervym Hardingham, quoting from a statement made on the subject by the Australian Minister for Health Services. (Reproduced in the *Statesman*, August 6, 1990, p. 6).

It seems that this massive consumption of alcohol has resulted in a serious increase in road accidents and that ailments which are known to result from heavy drinking have become prevalent. One out of ten Australians suffer from alcohol-related brain damage. Attempts to check or reduce drinking through anti-liquor campaigns and increased taxes on drinks have been a dismal failure.

Certain Australian intellectuals have made a proposal to solve the problem through education. But Mr. Hardinge is sceptical. He says, "Any anti-liquor education programme must inevitably fail, for the simple reason that most of the prospective converts would, be too fuddled to attend class."

The view expressed here about anti-liquor education holds true for other efforts of this kind. For instances, the many programmes shown on television in Pakistan under the scheme of Islamization were watched only by those who had no need of them, for the people at whom these programmes were actually targetted switched off their TV sets as soon as they were announced.

The truth is that all such reformation in thinking can be more effectively carried out through sustained missionary effort rather than through school education or T.V, programmes.